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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by World Vision International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

World Vision International welcomes the 2007 Commission on the Status of Women's (CSW) focus on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Over the last 10 years, 189 countries have adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action with strong recommendations to improve the status of the girl child. The Millennium Development Goals have again focused the world's attention on the girl child and the necessity of gender equity for the alleviation of poverty. Yet today, while the international community has seen great progress, governments are still struggling to fulfil their commitments. More must be done to protect girls from the countless acts of injustice they suffer and to provide an environment in which they will thrive.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Inspired by our Christian values, World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. We serve all people regardless of religion, race ethnicity or gender.

World Vision works within nearly 100 nations realising that gender equity is not only key to the prevention of discrimination and violence, but also essential for sustainable development, peace and the achievement of healthy and just relationships. As a child focused organization, we prioritise the poorest and most vulnerable children and empower them and their families and communities to improve child survival, development, protection and participation.

World Vision works alongside communities to challenge harmful traditional practices that hurt girls, to foster respect and value for girls, and to empower girls to be active participants of their own development and become leaders of their communities.

For the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, World Vision calls upon the CSW Member States to uphold children's rights through educating girls and preventing violence.

Uphold children's rights

The principle of non-discrimination and the right to protection from abuse and exploitation are some of the cornerstones of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and yet the abuse and discrimination of girls too often go unnoticed and unpunished. In order to protect the rights of girls, states must uphold the CRC, gender inequity must be addressed, and all people sensitised to children's and women's rights.

World Vision recommends that governments:

1. Work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to commit to adequately recording social statistical data by disaggregating records of women and girls, men and boys, and create indicators and monitoring systems to track the status of the girl child.

2. Enforce the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two Optional Protocols, with funding and accountability mechanisms, and enhance the

political will needed to do so, as governments are legally bound by the conventions. Ensure that all citizens understand the provisions of the conventions and other laws for the protection of human rights, and the importance of the prevention of violence and abuse to protect vulnerable girls and women. This can be achieved through school curricula and through educating all children, parents, teachers, welfare and law enforcement officers on children's rights and human rights.

3. Reduce child labour and ensure completion of primary and secondary education by empowering parents, especially mothers, with income-generating skills and by providing them with loans for small businesses and market access for their products.

4. Enhance health care delivery in rural areas by providing additional health care facilities, increased medical personnel (including traditional birth attendants), and increased access to medication, including anti-retroviral drugs, and work together with civil society to reduce the stigma and discrimination that surround people affected by HIV and AIDS.

5. Support the formation of community-based abuse prevention activities, including the formation of child protection committees, mentoring programmes, provision of day care centres for children of working parents, and psychological, legal and social support to families and orphaned children. Work with parents to promote a rights-based approach to parenting and gender equality, and support them in learning new parenting skills, including non-violent forms of discipline that will enable their girl children to develop self-confidence and the will to achieve.

6. Engage men and boys to create gender parity: encourage them to contribute to the work of household chores and to challenge violence and gender roles and traditions that are unjust and harmful.

Educate girls

High illiteracy rates among women and lower school attendance rates among girls, especially at the secondary level, constitute discrimination against the girl child. Unreasonable workloads in the home, preferences for sons, a disregard for the rights of girls, early marriage, child labour, poverty, and the threat of violence keep too many girls from completing their education and trap them and their families in cycles of poverty.

World Vision and the international community acknowledge that the education of girls is one of the most effective methods for the development of a nation and the eradication of poverty, and that educating girls also protects them from discrimination and violence.

To this end, World Vision recommends that governments:

7. Prioritise girls' education through committing a significant portion of the national budget to ensure free, compulsory and quality inclusive education for all (including children with disabilities). Incentives like school feeding programmes, providing uniforms and books, career education, and boarding facilities and scholarships for higher education motivate and ensure high retention and completion rates.

8. Improve the quality of education. Reform curricula to better engage girl children and eliminate gender-biased language; apply innovative teaching methods and learning materials that encourage boys and girls to challenge harmful traditional roles and adopt equitable relationships; raise awareness of children's rights; prepare girls for the workplace; and provide incentives to attract and maintain quality teachers, especially in rural areas.

9. Ensure that reproductive health and sex education are taught in the classroom and encourage values-based decision making. Challenge harmful and risky behaviour, and empower children and youth to avoid unwanted sex, with the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections as a central tenet.

10. Ensure girls who are orphaned, married girls, pregnant girls and teenage mothers stay in traditional school programmes. Develop training courses for teachers to understand girls' needs. Provide specialised educational programmes and materials of good quality that incorporate life skills including literacy, numeracy, health and income-generating skills for children with disabilities, institutionalised children, girls who have previously dropped out of school, and girls in especially difficult circumstances. Incorporate recreation time and flexible school schedules so youth may continue their education and transform the lives of their daughters, families, selves and society.

Prevent violence

The majority of the world's women and girls will experience violence; whether it's physical, psychological or sexual violence, it plagues every community and many homes. Violence damages health, can prevent education and economic ability, and can forever scar the girl's spiritual, psychological and emotional well-being. States must take extraordinary action to protect their most vulnerable citizens: girl children.

To this end, World Vision recommends that governments:

11. Prevent all forms of child abuse, through community-based education and sensitisation. Educate men and boys especially on their roles in preventing violence against the girl child and the rights of the girl child to be free of sexual exploitation; educate girls on their rights and empower them to recognise and even prevent abuse and unwanted sex.

12. Sensitise individuals, communities and law protection forces to understand, recognise and protect women and girls who are trafficked and forced into prostitution; create and fund multinational and regional coalitions to stop human trafficking, prevent child sex tourism, and identify and prosecute traffickers and abusers of women and children.

13. Provide care centres, in partnership with NGOs, for counselling and restoring girls and women who are victims of violence, sexual exploitation, and abuse, and empower these girls and women through job skills training.

14. Fund and enforce the strict implementation of national policies on violence and discrimination against women and girl children and incorporate follow-up actions to the 2006 UN Secretary-General's study on Violence against Children and the 2006 UN Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women.

World Vision acknowledges the significant challenge of citizens to hold governments accountable. Therefore, we call on all CSW Member States to take seriously their previous commitments to girls' rights, women's rights and human rights. We urge governments to put mechanisms in place to enforce the implementation of their own commitments, to put power behind the treaties and agreements they endorse and sign. Furthermore, World Vision suggests partnership with social institutions and civil society – such as churches, councils of elders, women's and men's organisations, educators, children's clubs, community leaders and parents – to ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.